Agency Administrator's Briefing

Critical Incident Stress Management Program

The Critical Incident Stress Management Program is designed for individuals affected by potentially traumatic events which are outside their normal work experience. We need to respond to these in a way that is qualitatively different to that in normal work situations. Individuals experience critical incidents in different ways and vary in their reaction to similar events. What may be traumatic for one may not be for others. It is not possible to make rigid recommendations for all situations and employees.

Clearly defined practices for managing incidents, clear guidance on dealing with the immediate aftermath of an incident and longer term support for employees is vital. These approaches, adapted to differing organizational needs, will lessen adverse effects on individuals and the organization as a whole.

One of the most effective intervention strategies for emergency responders is Critical Incident Stress Management or "CISM". This multi-tactic early intervention program is a structured, peer-driven, clinician-guided approach to crisis intervention developed specifically for responders dealing with major stress-producing events. It is a package of crisis intervention techniques that have been bundled together to achieve maximal effect of reducing stress reactions. It further serves to identify people who need help and assist those people in recovering. Peer Support is the method used to deliver CISM services in the BLM.

CIPS Groups conduct crisis intervention sessions that are designed to do more than encourage responders to "talk about it." They educate them about the signs and symptoms of stress pointing out that such problems as sleeplessness, lack of concentration, and replaying the scene in their mind, etc. are common reactions to intense events. The CIPS Groups which includes a licensed Mental Health Care Professional also provides information on positive coping mechanisms.

Critical Incidents

The recognized definition of a critical incident is quite broad. A critical incident is not defined by the incident itself; it is defined by individuals and/or an organization's reaction to what occurred. Some examples include:

- Acts of terrorism
- Difficult body recoveries
- High-impact recovery operations, disaster recover work
- Catastrophic incidents that expose organizations, employees, and their families to substantial grief
- Aviation incidents
- Entrapments / Burn-overs / Shelter deployments
- Shootings – Active Shooter
- Vehicle fatalities and injuries
- Suicides

A critical incident is any unexpected, traumatic event that affects an individual's feelings of personal safety, their ability to perform daily activities, and their ability to concentrate on their normal job duties. Simply put, a critical incident is a traumatic event (or perceived life-threatening event) that has sufficient power to overwhelm an individual's ability to cope.

The BLM does not maintain "CISM Teams." Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) Groups are assembled at the time of request and will be comprised of trained and credentialed CIPS personnel selected to match the backgrounds and experience of those involved in the critical incident (helitack, engines, dispatchers, smokejumpers, etc). The BLM Peer Support Program selects only the best and most qualified for each assignment, including trainees. Those selected must be credible, experienced in fire and aviation, trusted and held in high esteem. They must be sensitive to diversity and multi-cultural components within the agencies

Critical Incident Peer Support

Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) is about peers, or "people of mutual respect" helping each other, i.e., firefighters helping firefighters. In wildland fire, it is the shared culture and experiences which form the foundation of peer support. The benefits of early intervention using both professional and specially trained peer support personnel have been shown to promote positive recovery from traumatic stress. This "support group" intervention model includes a Mental Health Care Clinician who specializes in trauma along with the trained peers, was first developed for use with military combat veterans.

Over time this model which is referred to as the "International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF)" model has found its way into civilian first responders (police, fire, ambulance, emergency workers, and disaster rescuers). It is accepted as the most effective standard of care for organizations with cultures having a history of mistrust in outside sources for crisis intervention and support. It is also the Standard of Care adopted by the Bureau of Land Management.

The shared experiences of peers foster the initial trust and credibility necessary for developing relationships in which individuals are willing to open up and discuss their reactions and concerns after a critical incident. Peer relationships are effective because they are built around this mutual understanding, respect and trust.

Peer Supporters have received training and certification as Critical Incident Peer Supporters through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF). They are trained to listen, assess and refer, when necessary to a trauma intervention Mental Health Care Professional. Peer Supporters should never be used as a replacement for this professional care and **should never** function independently. This would put them outside of the scope and boundaries of competence they've been trained for.

The CIPS Group provides a confidential atmosphere of concern and caring as well as identifying personal options for dealing with stress.

CIPS intervention is not psychotherapy or counseling. It is not a treatment for PTSD and is not intended as a substitute for any of these treatments. Neither is CIPS a critique or investigation of the traumatic event. CISPS personnel are not trained to deal with mediation or local administrative issues.

..I was almost certain the crew felt comfortable with these guys. They looked like hotshots, acted like hotshots because they were hotshots…

What We Do

- Situational assessment for managers to help determine the timing and type of support needed for each incident. Each process is put in place based on a methodical approach. Tactics are applied at the right time, in the right place and under the right circumstances.
- Provide a CIPS Group which includes the expertise of a licensed, professional mental health care provider who is experienced in trauma
- Committed to Code of Ethics and confidentiality requirements.
- Provide peer supporters who can travel to the fire line, spike camp and other remote locations.

Terminology

Critical Incident Stress Management: a crisis intervention process that allows peers to help their peers understand problems that might occur after an event.

Crisis Intervention: temporary, active, and supportive entry into the life of individuals or groups during a period of extreme distress.

Peer Support: A peer is in a position to offer support by virtue of relevant experience: he or she has "been there, done that" and can relate to others who are now in a similar situation.

Timeline – CISM intervention (peer support) generally starts no sooner than 48-72 hours after an incident. Crisis intervention is not an emergency however assistance should be ordered as soon as possible. Peer Support services can also be provided within a few weeks or longer depending on the incident. It is important to allow time for affected individuals to disengage operationally, and re-connect with family or friends. Once this occurs individuals are typically emotionally ready to benefit from peer support.

Peer Support has been shown to lead to improved mental health outcomes. If your staff have been exposed to a significant incident it is important to **get advice** on what post-incident support would be appropriate as soon as possible. For more information go to: https://gacc.nifc.gov/cism/documents/criteria_for_appropriate_response.pdf

Agency Administrator's Roles and Responsibilities

1. Identification of the Event as a Critical Incident
The Agency Administrator is responsible for identifying an event as a critical incident. The Agency Administrator is the highest ranking agency line officer with direct responsibility for the location of the incident/personnel involved in the incident.

2. **Requesting Peer Support (CISM):** Requests for Peer Support should be made by the Agency Administrator or designee to the appropriate Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC). A general overview of the situation is required and GACC will work with the Geographic Area Critical Incident CISM Coordinator, who will determine the number and types of positions needed. The GACC will work with the CISM Coordinator to order support group members via the roster function in ROSS. Critical Incident Peer Support Group personnel are to be ordered as THSP and not CISD.

2. Request Critical Incident Stress Management Intervention through the Appropriate Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC)
When an order is placed a Critical Incident Stress Management Coordinator will be assigned who will work with the Agency Administrator and designated Peer Group Leader to determine the appropriate response protocols, timeframes, and decide the size and make-up of the group.

Often a CIPS group member will arrive before the group leader, peer supporters or the clinician. The individual will assist with any immediate needs, meet with the ordering Agency Administrator to gather facts, determine timelines, make an assessment of the impacted individuals and groups, and brief the Agency Administrator on the process. This "liaison" will initiate logistical support, determine meeting times and locations, arrange for facilities etc.

3. Manage Information about the Critical Incident:
Acknowledge to employees that an incident has occurred. By providing factual information to your employees, you can help prevent rumors from spreading. Provide a consistent message to all groups concerning the incident. Address any rumors that may be circulating, or concerns employees may voice.

4. Support Employees:
Employees who have experienced trauma respond best to information, structure, and instructions on what to expect next. Find out what employees are planning to do with their time once they leave work and provide accountability partners. Coordinate with staff to identify the employees most affected by the traumatic event and offer them a quiet place to be, but don't force them to be isolated if they'd prefer to stay with their co-workers.

Leadership is always an opportunity to reinforce and build trust, confidence, and workplace cohesiveness. When done well, employees will feel cared about, supported, and secure in the knowledge that leadership is both compassionate and competent. Feeling cared about and supported in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event is hugely important in the healing and recovery process.

5. Provide Information to the CIPS Group:
The Agency Administrator or designee is responsible for providing the CISM Coordinator with information about the incident. The Agency Administrator is responsible for providing a budget code for expenses associated with CIPS Group response. The Peer Support Group Coordinator will assist in determining a location for facility for CIPS meetings.

The Agency Administrator or designee will make time to provide a briefing for the CIPS Group Leader upon arrival. The Agency Administrator or designee is also responsible for providing the CIPS Group Leader with contact information for the EAP provider and/or other resources that may be available to provide support within their local area.

6. Follow Up:
As well as meeting immediate support needs, follow up with staff affected by a critical incident or other form of potentially traumatic situation. How and when follow up occurs should always be proportionate to the individual situation and the level of distress the employee shows.

Working with Incident Management Teams

While the majority of critical incidents occur during initial attack or while performing pre-suppression activities, they also happen when an Incident Management Team (IMT) is assigned. The Incident Commander (IC) is responsible for making the request through the Agency Administrator when support is required.

The Critical Incident Peer Support Group reports to the Agency Administrator or designee. This is important since "incidents within and incident" affect many other groups and not just the IMT and the resources assigned the fire. More often than not, a separate CIPS group will be ordered to respond to the home unit of those assigned to the fire and involved in the incident.

Human Resource Specialists (HRSP) are not generally utilized as the point of contact for coordination of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and Critical Incident Peer Support activities. While they may provide immediate support, coordination at the Command and General Staff level has proven to be more appropriate. The CISM Coordinator will assign a Liaison to coordinate directly with the CIPS Leader, the Agency Administrator and as the IC to identify someone from Command and General Staff to function as the point of contact.

Coordination with Investigations

Consideration should be given to employees involved in investigations and learning review teams etc., as to the timing of crisis intervention services.

The CISM Coordinator is available to provide assistance and coordination with the Investigation Team Leader to ensure that their personnel also have access to crisis mental health care professionals.

Agency administrators should meet with the investigation team and Critical Incident Peer Support Group/CISM personnel separately for introductions and to deliver commander's intent and answer questions.

These meetings are done separately due to confidentiality expectations and so roles of investigative groups and CISM stay within their respective boundaries.

For more information visit:

https://gacc.nifc.gov/cism/index.html

Other CISM Personnel

To ensure consistency and a coordinated approach to helping those affected by a critical incident, members of the assigned CIPS Group are required to complete specific training courses from the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) and demonstrate competency in their skills. Sometimes, CIPS personnel may be too close to an incident (home unit, close relations, family, etc.) to be an effective peer supporter. In those circumstances, while not providing direct peer support services, they can provide a wealth of information and be a local resource for the CIPS group.

When Peer Support services are ordered outside the National or Geographic Area programs (such as a local fire department or other agency) it is recommended that additional orders not be placed for a CIPS Group without coordinating with the National or Geographic Area CISM Coordinator. Uncoordinated interventions create confusion, result in duplicate efforts and are counterproductive to the people we are trying to help.

When local peer support groups or groups from other areas want to provide "CISM" services immediately after a critical incident, it is important to remember that this can lead to the same problems (coordination, training consistency and duplication) mentioned above. Even with good intentions, not everyone who offers to help is the best resource for the people who need the help. While they may check in with employees or managers at the incident and identify themselves as being with "CISM" our CIPS Groups do not co-mingle or integrate them into our group. The CISM Coordinator will provide the requesting unit with a roster of approved CISM personnel who have been officially ordered.